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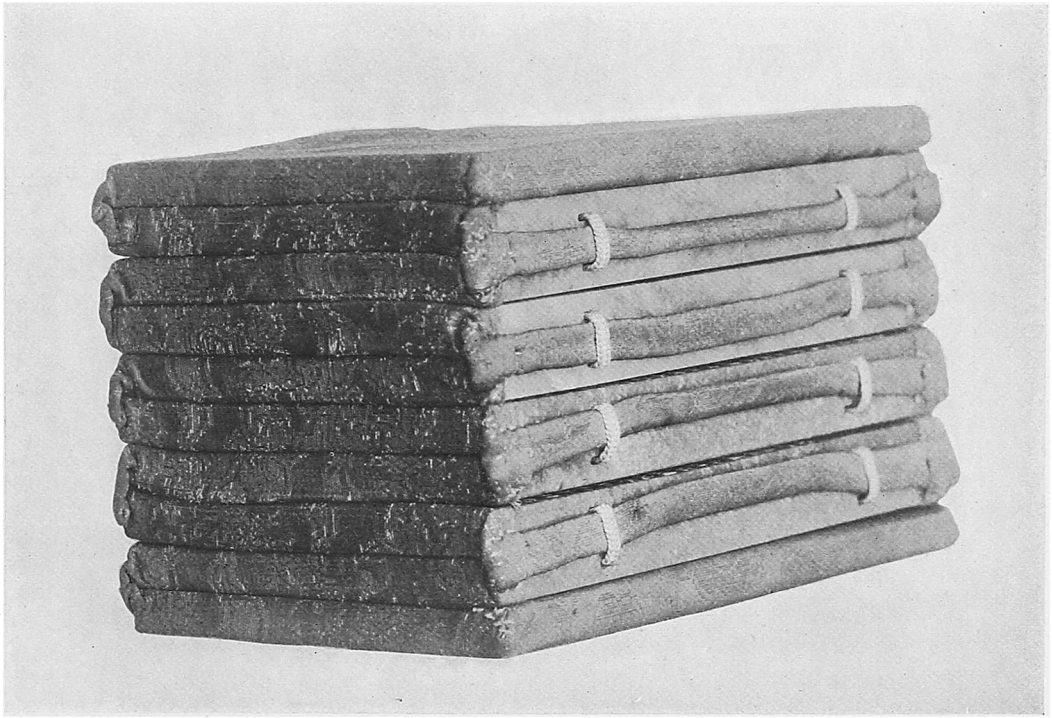
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IMPERIAL CHINESE JADE SEAL OF EMPRESS JUI [1796-1797]



*IMPERIAL CHINESE JADE BOOK [CLOSED] OF EMPEROR KANG-HSI [1662-1722]*

## Two Chinese Imperial Jades

By BERTHOLD LAUFER

Associate Curator of Asiatic Ethnology, Field Museum, Chicago

**T**HANKS to the generosity of Mr. Fritz von Frantzius, the well-known maecen and patron of art, the Field Museum of Natural History has recently been made the grateful recipient of a very important gift in the form of two Chinese jades which possess an intrinsic value from an artistic, antiquarian, and historical point of view. Both objects are precious relics of the Manchu dynasty, which was overthrown in 1911. It is well known that since the establishment of the Chinese republic the imperial family retired into seclusion, and being reduced to a limited income, was compelled to coin numerous heirlooms and art treasures on the market abroad. It is believed that in this manner these two rare and unique objects landed

in this country and found their final resting-place in Chicago.

One of these is a complete jade-book bound in imperial yellow silk brocade and wrapped up in a silk shawl with dragons woven in gold threads. In its appearance it is a veritable book composed of ten rectangular slabs of uniform dimensions (11x5x $\frac{1}{2}$  inches) carved from Khotan nephrite of exquisite quality, thirty pounds in weight. It is the most solid book in the world, and certainly one of the finest ever executed, making a strong appeal to our esthetic sense. The binding has been effected by perforating each tablet at four points along the two narrow sides; the borings made by means of a tubular drill run a short distance and turn under a right



IMPERIAL JADE BOOK OF THE EMPEROR KANG-SHI,  
[OPEN] SHOWING TABLETS I AND II



LAST TWO TABLETS [PAGES IX AND X] OF THE  
IMPERIAL JADE BOOK OF THE EMPEROR KANG-HSI

angle toward the back—in view of the extreme hardness of the mineral a wonderful feat of technical skill. Yellow silk ribbons pass through these perforations and over the back of the slab, the tablets thus being held together. The first and last inner pages are each engraved with a pair of rampant five-clawed dragons, soaring in clouds and making for the flamed pearl, the grooves being incrustated with gold. The rest is taken up by a composition of the Emperor Kang-hsi (1662-1722), the ablest ruler produced by the Manchu. It was in his era that Chinese art of modern times, patronized by this intelligent sovereign, reached its climax. No porcelains have earned a greater admiration than those produced in the Kang-hsi period. The same high eulogy must be bestowed upon the glyptic works created by the hand of the lapidary, and in this particular field the artisans of China are unrivaled. An Arabic writer has not unjustly said that when Allah distributed mental gifts among mankind he placed them to the Greeks—in their heads; to the Arabs—in their tongues; and to the Chinese—in their hands.

The text is written in Chinese, the Chinese version occupying the tablets 2 to 5 and being accompanied by a translation into Manchu, which is engraved on the tablets 6 to 9. Different colors of jade have been chosen for the Chinese and the Manchu, greenish jade for the former, and a gray clouded jade for the latter. The engraved lines of the characters are filled with indigo-blue, symbolic of the color of the sky, while imperial names are prominently emphasized by being inlaid with gold foil. The document recorded on these tablets, being of a religious and ceremonial character, is intensely interesting; it is an act of canonization: the Emperor, speaking himself, confers upon his grandmother, the Empress Wen, the posthumous title Hiao Chuang, which means "filial and sedate." In the belief of the Chinese the ancestors continue to live, and largely contribute to

regulate and control the actions of the living generation. Ancestors may be promoted in rank, and honors may be bestowed upon them; also they may be deprived of rank and title.

The said Empress was the consort of Tien-tsung (1626-1643) and the mother of the first sovereign of the Manchu dynasty, Shun-chi (1644-1661), who was born in 1636. As he was only a boy eight years old at the time of the Manchu conquest of China, his mother was appointed Dowager Empress in 1644. In 1662 she received the title Empress Grandmother. She died on January 27, 1688, and was canonized on November 8 of the same year, the date of our jade book. The interval which elapsed between these two dates gives us a welcome clue to the time consumed on the production of the jade book: the work was accomplished within a period of nine months or less, and this is astounding in view of the difficulty of graving jade which can be attacked only by means of diamond-points, emery, or ruby.

The Emperor performed an act of filial piety growing out of the tenets of ancestral worship by invoking his grandmother in order to bestow upon her the posthumous title by which she should be known to posterity. The purpose of having this state document carved in jade was twofold: first, to keep a permanent record of it, and, secondly, to convey the message directly to the spirit of the Empress in the celestial regions. In order to accomplish this end, they resorted to jade and the azure-blue coating laid over the writing. Jade, ranking as the most valuable of all jewels in the eyes of the Chinese, was believed to embody qualities of solar light and to communicate directly with heavenly powers by means of its transcendental properties. In ancient times the Chinese emperors followed the observance to announce to the great nature-deities heaven and earth their accession to the throne, the announcement being made on five tablets of jade.



Of all precious materials, jade at all times claimed the first rank in the estimation of the Chinese. It has been their most highly appreciated jewel from remote ages, and has been idealized by their poets and philosophers as the quintessence of nature, as the embodiment of all virtues, instilling into the hearts of its wearers the principles of good conduct and all noble and sublime thoughts. It was interred with the dead to preserve their bodies from decay and to promote their resurrection. The last tribute paid to a departed friend was to send his family a piece of carved jade to be placed in his grave.

The other jade object added to the collections of the Field Museum is an imperial seal which was conferred upon the Empress Jui, consort of the Emperor Kia-king, on February 12, 1796, the day when she received her official appointment as Empress of China. The square base of the seal, which has a weight of six pounds and three quarters, is surmounted by a pair of coalescing, four-clawed dragons, serving as handle, the whole being carved from a single block of stone, a very charming transparent plant-green contrasting from white inclusions. The carver has brought out the finest details of the mythical mon-

ster, even the teeth, and his harmonious achievement signifies a veritable triumph of spirit and skill over matter. The seal consists of twenty-one Chinese characters written in ancient style, accompanied by a parallel Manchu version, which is composed of eulogistic attributes of the Empress. Only the sovereign and his legitimate consort were entitled to the possession of jade seals. Under the Manchu, the number of official seals at the disposal of the Emperor amounted to twenty-five.

These two memorable palace-treasures, presented by Mr. Fritz von Frantzius, are now on exhibition in the Field Museum of Natural History, in Hall 45 of the East Wing. They are a valuable addition to the collection of jade formerly gathered in China under the auspices of Mrs. T. B. Blackstone, and must be ranked among the finest and most interesting productions of jade in this country. Mr. von Frantzius has manifested his interest in the institution in various other ways: he has recently donated likewise an important collection of Japanese coinage, about eight hundred specimens, which had been brought together at the instigation of the Japanese government.